



# PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

*Salesian Province of St. Joseph, Hyderabad*



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JANUARY 2021

## Let us be Moved by Hope

Finally! The infamous 2020 has come to an end. What an unprecedented year it had been. The Covid-19 Year disrupted our lives drastically. It was a year of lockdowns, social distancing, masks, sanitizers, quarantines, isolation, webinars, online classes, work from home, etc. All of a sudden this invisible virus has shaken us out of our well-controlled lives and predictable futures. It is amidst these fears, chaos, uncertainty, despair and death, that we have welcomed the New Year 2021, with a lot of hope and expectations for a better future. After all we are hardwired to Hope. If despair was the watchword and the reality of 2020, Hope is its counterpart in 2021. 'Hope' is the inner dynamic that compels us to explore and pursue the expectations built into the human condition. St. Thomas Aquinas calls hope "a movement or stretching forth of the appetite towards an arduous good." Hope has the power to see beyond the seeming boundaries and draw our lives back on tracks. Hope is built into our DNA. It turns our anxieties into certainties. As a province and as individuals, we are not unfamiliar with several moments of Hope, that gave us the reason to move on. On 16<sup>th</sup> of December, two of our confreres, Fr Thomas Santiago and Fr Joseph Abraham underwent a major surgery that involved a Liver Transplant. As there were risks involved to both the donor and the recipient, the entire province and the several well wishers prayed incessantly, waiting in hope for a possible miracle. In these extreme moments of uncertainty and fear, we experienced the gentle accompaniment of the Lord and of our Blessed Mother. The miracle happened.

In this circular I would like to present the summary of the Strenna (2021) of our Rector Major, Fr Angel Fernandez Arttime, titled: Moved by Hope - 'Behold I make all things new' (Rev. 21:5). He reflects on the existential experience of humanity that was badly hit by Covid-19, and which continues to have its ramifications for our future. The Rector Major proposes a Salesian reading of the present time, to undertake educational paths and actions capable of bringing about a change in values and vision, always letting ourselves be accompanied by Mary, the Star of Hope.

Strenna of the Rector Major - Moved by Hope: 'See, I am making all things New' (Rev 21:5)

### The Global Situation of the Pandemic that Challenges Us

I could not write a single page of commentary on the Strenna 2021 by ignoring what has simultaneously affected all of humanity in all countries. We are going through very difficult times; we have experienced something we could never have imagined or suspected. We have a lot of unanswered questions and we hear dates proclaimed of a proximate end to this pandemic despite the fact that there is no confirmation of this. (Now we have manifestations of new strains of the virus) This has all happened because of COVID-19: an infectious disease caused by a virus hitherto unknown to human beings.

The exceptional nature of the present moment touches us deeply. Every country, has certainly been blocked if not paralyzed. Travel is out of the question, there has been no possibility of keeping appointments at world and international level. The "global village" has gone back to being, and will certainly remain so for some time, a collection of many "villages" regarding each other with suspicion. Walls have fallen, but for "self-protection" frontiers have been much more reinforced.

Faced with this situation we can repeat thousands of messages saying that we will overcome it, that we need to trust in ourselves, that we are strong, that in each case national pride has overcome worse situations, etc. Many of these messages, that are also a mindset, a way of interpreting current events, smack of the "Promethean" claims described in the well-known Greek myth in which someone is singularly able to rebuild him or herself, reinvent themselves, draw strength from their own weakness in order to overcome adversity. This is very much a pagan mindset. Many of these messages have nothing to do with the meaning of life, of every life, and much less so with God and the journey we have experienced in this moment of history.

However, this is not our view, nor is it the message we wish to pass on in the many places where we are as a Salesian Family. So then, our message emphasizes and insists that faced with this tough and painful reality with its weighty consequences, we continue to express the certainty of being moved by hope: because God in his Spirit continues to make "all things new". Pope Francis has invited the world to become infected with "the necessary antibodies of justice, charity and solidarity" for reconstruction once the days of pandemic are over.

We cannot deny how much sorrow the world is experiencing at the moment. We cannot deny how many millions of poor people have been infected and have lost their lives. If we are invited to keep a safe distance, can we imagine how people crowded into the favelas, the slums, next to rubbish dumps can respect social distancing? The loss of jobs is affecting millions of families...; mourning that cannot take place leaves millions of hearts in sorrow; looming poverty (at times hunger) affects, disorients, paralyses and threatens to bury every hope.

Let us be inspired by Don Bosco's Response and that of many Witnesses in our Salesian Family to such Situations

We make reference to our Father Don Bosco because he himself throughout his life had to face the harshness of so many situations, so many tragedies and so much pain. He is a teacher in showing us how the way of faith and hope not only enlightens us but also gives us the necessary strength to change unfavorable or adverse conditions, or at least to limit them as far as possible. Our Father stood out for his extraordinary tenacity and for his special and profoundly realistic perspective on things. He knew how to look beyond the problems that commenced already at his childhood with the death of his father and later the struggles that he encountered to realize the dream of 9. In Turin, the cholera situation was - at local level - similar to what we are going through now in every country. As an educator and pastor he accompanied this situation together with his boys. While there were people who were only worried about themselves and their needs, Don Bosco and his boys, like many others, were busy helping to overcome the tragedy. We can say that this profound perspective of faith and hope was something he showed throughout his life: when he left his mother and home and went to live as a "waiter" at the Cafe "Pianta" so he could study in Chieri, facing loneliness and difficulties; or weeping and suffering because he did not

know where he could take and welcome his boys until he met Giuseppe Pinardi... All of this confirms how Don Bosco was moved by the virtue of hope.

We find valuable examples and life models in Salesian holiness that encourage us to hope as a virtue and attitude of life in God. Blessed Stefan Sandor (1914-1953): offers us a real example of what it means to move from division to unity and then to communion. Blessed Sister Maddalena Morano (1847-1908) stood out as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians for an apostolic daring that made her what Don Bosco always wanted from his daughters in the spirit of Mornese: to be living monuments of the Virgin. As "born teacher", she knew that the liberating act in her Salesian mission meant teaching her girls to open the frontiers of their hearts and minds so as to transcend the narrow confines of an oppressive culture of poverty and lack of opportunity. There are a few other models of hope: Servant of God Fr Charles Braga (1889-1971) Blessed Joseph Kowalski (1911-1942) Servant of God Antonino Baglieri (1951-2007).

The Spirit that Makes all Things New (Rev 21:5)

Christian hope is historical and is based on deep trust in God, the God of Jesus Christ who never abandons his people and is always with him. Our faith continuously shows how God, through his Spirit, accompanies the history of humankind, including in the most adverse and unfavorable circumstances. This God who does not suffer but has compassion, according to the beautiful expression of Saint Bernard di Chiaravalle: "Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis" (God does not suffer but he is not lacking in compassion). God never abandons his people in salvation history, he always stays with them, especially when their pain becomes so overwhelming: "I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Is 43,19)."

The hope that moves us makes every little human hope fruitful, showing the great values in which humanity has invested its best energies: truth, goodness, justice, solidarity, peace, love, etc., and they do not turn into utopias but become concrete and partial realizations of the great plan that God has always prepared for all humanity and that becomes definitive in Christ. This is the hope that moves us.

A Salesian Interpretation of the Present Moment

Many are the interpretations that have been made of this historical moment, a moment that - they say - occurs every hundred years, with great crises that affect humanity for one reason or another. Not even the bloodiest wars have been as "global" as the situation we are experiencing. In any case, what response can we give? What contribution can we offer as a Salesian Family? What Gospel values, read in a Salesian perspective, do we feel we can offer? How can we, as educators, offer an alternative - "education to hope"? Can we propose alternative processes to the dominant culture of our time?

We need to move from closure to openness, from individualism to solidarity, from isolation to genuine encounter, from division to unity and communion, from pessimism to hope, from emptiness and lack of meaning to transcendence. God speaks to us through so many people who have known how to live with hope: in extreme situations God continues to speak to us through the hearts of people who see and respond differently. The Salesian holiness of our Family is rich in models of those who have known how to live moved by hope.

We do not save ourselves by ourselves alone. No one is saved alone. The sense of what I am trying to say is in this quotation from Pope Francis: "If there's one thing we've learned in all this time, it's that nobody saves themselves. Borders fall, walls crumble, and all fundamentalist discourse dissolves before an almost imperceptible presence that manifests the fragility of which we are made... It is the breath of the Spirit that opens up horizons, awakens creativity and renews us in fraternity to make us present (or to make us say: 'Here I am') before the enormous and imponderable task that awaits us. It is urgent to discern and feel the pulse of the Spirit in order to give impetus, together with others, to the dynamics that can witness and channel the new life that the Lord wants to generate at this concrete moment in history."

As a Salesian Family we have tried to give answers at this time of emergency as a sign of charity and hope, and today we must be the alternatives. We have to accompany young people on life's journey, opening them up to other horizons and new perspectives, and lead them to learning to live "on the edge" within a "limitless" society. That is, by helping young people and adults to discover the "normality of life" in simplicity, authenticity, sobriety and depth. We have to let ourselves be challenged by the many voices of hope from young people in difficult times: the ecological movement and their solidarity with the needy.

As a Salesian Family we can be a Witness of Hope

Faith and hope go together. Let us propose faith as the authentic path because "a world without God is a world without hope" (Cf. Eph 2:12). Let us imitate Don Bosco and his great capacity for enthusing his youngsters to live life as a celebration and "faith as happiness." Prayer is the school of hope and personal encounter with the love of Jesus Christ who saves us. Let us journey with the young and their families by praying.

Let us grow by living with a sense of the fatigue of daily life. Let us help the young and their families, and the People of God, to discover the gifts that God gives us, without complaint, proposing objectives that enthuse them and take away monotony and mediocrity. Let us live hope especially in times of difficulty and loss. Let us allow ourselves to be educated by God. Let us trust him especially in times of darkness. St Teresa of Avila, a great mystic, recognizes that dryness is God's invitation to "move forward".

Hope as a decisive return to the poor and excluded. In our family, fidelity to the Lord with Don Bosco passes above all through the preferential option for the poorest, the most abandoned and the excluded. Recognizing ourselves in the other's pain. To be faithful to Don Bosco today, the Father of our Salesian Family, means being actively on the side of those who suffer any kind of injustice. Converting to hope is believing in the plan of the Gospel. For this reason, as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, we cannot fail to show who the reason is for our Hope, Jesus Christ and his Gospel. As a concrete commitment to take up as the Salesian family, let us distribute and read (alone, as a family, in groups) the latest Encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, which puts fraternity at the centre of everything.

MARY of Nazareth, Mother of God, Star of Hope

Mary our Mother, knows well what it means to trust and hope against all hope, trusting in the name of God. Her "yes" to God has awakened all hope for humankind. She experienced helplessness and loneliness at the birth of her Son; she kept in her heart the announcement of a sorrow that would pierce her heart. (Cf. Lk 2:35); she experienced the suffering of seeing her Son

be a “sign of contradiction”, misunderstood, rejected. She knew of hostility and rejection directed at her Son until when at the foot of the cross on Golgotha, she understood that Hope would not die. That is why she stayed with the disciple as a mother - “Woman, here is your son” (Jn 19:26) - as the Mother of Hope.

Our great challenge, as the Salesian Family, is simply to be a sign of Hope, to put light and color, to look with understanding, to continue to heal and accompany what this pandemic has hurt, to continue to be attentive to the needs of others, as Mother Mazzarello and Don Bosco taught us. I have enclosed the Commentary of the Rector Major on Strenna 2021. I invite all the Rectors/In-charges of Communities to facilitate both community and personal reflection on the theme of Strenna 2021 paying particular attention also to the inclusion of the members of the Salesian Family in this process. You will also receive the Strenna Poster prepared for our Province.

#### THE MIRACLE OF THE LIVER TRANSPLANT

With your prayerful accompaniment and the support of many officials, we have managed to obtain official permission for carrying out the liver transplant of Fr Joseph Abraham on December 16, 2020 at Continental Hospital, Gachibowli, made possible though the great sacrificial act of our Vice Provincial, Fr Thomas Santiago, who courageously came forward to donate over 61 percent of his liver. We also extend our sincere gratitude to his dear mother and all his brothers for their gracious consent for this major surgery. We thank the Lord and our Blessed Mother for the success of the surgical procedure that took over 18 hours and for guiding the hands of Dr Tom Cherian and his team. The surgery was successful. During the post-operative care there were a few minor complications. The entire province, thousands of well wishers in India and across the globe have been praying for our dear confreres. Even the doctors have attributed the process of healing to factors beyond reason. Fr Thomas Santiago was discharged from the hospital on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and Fr Joseph Abraham was discharged on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Both of them are in the provincial house. Fr Thomas Santiago has recovered very well and is enjoying good health. Fr Joseph Abraham is recuperating well. He will be visiting the hospital twice a week for medical review. Kindly continue to pray for the convalescence of our confreres. I would like to thank Fr Androth Jose for close follow up and care of our confreres all through. I also extend our gratitude to Mr George, the brother of Fr Joseph Abraham, Mr Francis Xavier, the brother of Fr Thomas Santiago, the provincial house community, Mr Bhartu and Charity sisters for their support.

#### LAUDATO SI' THIS MONTH - JANUARY

##### TEN GREEN COMMANDMENTS OF LAUDATO SI' - Green Commandment VI - Develop an Integral Ecology

In continuation of our efforts to study the theme of Laudato Si' encyclical and to put it into practice within the frame work of the priorities of the Province, I invite you to reflect on the 6<sup>th</sup> green commandment, that is, to develop an integral ecology.

The most remarkable thing about Laudato Si' is its integral approach. It is not mere environmentalism or fashionable green thinking, but “integral ecology”. We read there that since everything is closely interrelated and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis. The underlying metaphysics of the integral ecology of Pope Francis is the truth and conviction of the interrelatedness of the whole of reality and the interdependence of all created entities. The metaphysics of interrelatedness is at the very heart

of ecology that studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. The Pope notes how interrelatedness and interdependence is the law of life on our home planet. Living species are to be understood only as “part of a network”, “as the different aspects of the planet – physical, chemical and biological – are interrelated.” Ecosystems are basically the intricate interrelationship between species, “harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system”, so fundamental to sustain life on our home planet.

The integral approach adopted by Pope Francis necessitates that we widen the horizons of our talk of the ecological discourse. At times in the past, the ecological discourse ran the risk of being concerned mainly with the ‘environment’ outside, often dealing with issues like the protection of exotic species and the conservation of pristine ecosystems. The Pope reminds us in the encyclical that integral ecology essentially entails ‘human’ and ‘social’ dimensions. Pope Francis recalls a fundamental insight from pope Benedict in this regard, namely, that the world cannot be analyzed by isolating only one of its aspects, since the book of nature is one and indivisible and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations and so forth. Accordingly, any talk of the crisis of our common home and its healing needs to include humanity, in the first place. It is about the human and social dimensions of ecology that we need to address. For Pope Francis, the model of integral ecology is Saint Francis of Assisi himself, for his love for creation, love for the poor, and love for the Creator, the triple loves merged into a sublime unity.

#### Laudato Si’ Village (Green Village)

It is in this context that I would like to invite every community of the Province to come up with proposals and plans for creating a Green Village in our neighbourhood. I encourage you, in the spirit of Laudato Si’, to identify a village or villages where this project of Green Village can be materialized in collaboration and involvement of local authorities and every stakeholder. This is one way of moving to a higher and a more practical level in realizing the dream of the Holy Father to make our common home safe and sustainable for every member of our single human family. We already had several reflections and discussions on various concrete ways of responding to this global crisis. I would like to encourage each community to evolve concrete plans based on the specific contexts, needs and possibilities of each of the villages. You are requested to send your concrete plans and proposals latest by January 31, 2021.

#### YEAR DEDICATED TO ST. JOSEPH

Marking the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph being declared Patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis proclaimed a year-long celebration dedicated to the foster father of Jesus commencing from 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021. In the apostolic letter, “Patris Corde” (“With a father’s heart”), the Pope invited Christians to discover in St. Joseph, who often goes unnoticed, “an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble. St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation.

As Mary’s husband and guardian of the son of God, St. Joseph turned “his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home.” Despite being troubled at first by Mary’s pregnancy, St. Joseph was obedient to God’s will “regardless of the hardship involved.” “In every situation, Joseph declared his own ‘fiat,’ like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane’. All this makes it clear that St. Joseph was

called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood and that, in this way, he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation."

The Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican tribunal that deals with matters of conscience, also issued a decree on December 8 stating that plenary indulgences will be granted to Catholics not only through prayer and penance, but also through acts of justice, charity and piety dedicated to the foster father of Jesus. Let us make efforts to make St. Joseph the patron of our province known and loved so that his life example may inspire us to render our silent but valuable contribution to the building of God' Kingdom here and now.

#### ONLINE RETREATS

I communicated to you in my previous Circular that there would be only 2 online retreats in the month of February 2021. You will be required to attend the annual retreat as a Community meaning that those attending the retreat (a few members of the Community or the entire Community) will have to gather together in a suitable place for retreat talks as well as for all other practices of piety throughout the period of the retreat. The first online retreat will be held from February 15-20 and the second online retreat will be held from February 22-27, 2021. Both the retreats will be preached by Fr George Palamattam SDB from INS Province. I have attached a form along with this Circular. Kindly fill it up indicating your preference either for the first or second retreat and send it back to my office by January 31, 2021 either by post or by email.

#### CONSULTATIONS

You will be receiving the soft copies of the consultation papers along with this Circular. Consultations are being held for the Vice Provincial, a Provincial Council Member and for rectors who are finishing either their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> term in office. Participating in consultations is one of the important ways in which you contribute to the life and future of our Province. I urge you dear confreres, to print consultation forms in your respective communities and to carefully and prayerfully fill up the same and send the hard copies to my office marked as confidential latest by January 31, 2021.

#### PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

We are grateful to the Lord for the gift of 5 new priests this year. We congratulate Fr Salibindla Praveen, who received the gift of priesthood on December 29, 2020 at St. Francis Xavier Church, Yadireddipally, Nagarkurnool through Most Rev. GovinduJaji, Bishop of Nalgonda. We extend our felicitations to Fr Muthyala Sudhakar, Fr Pale Justin, Fr Kakumanu Praveen Kumar and Fr Thumma Pradeep who were ordained on January 07, 2021, at Don Bosco Shrine, Bandlagudajagir, Hyderabad by Most Rev. Thumma Bala, the archbishop emeritus of the archdiocese of Hyderabad. I commend them to your prayerful support, fraternal accompaniment and personal example so that the journey that they have begun on the day of their priestly ordination may not be hampered by any forces or attractions of this world and that they may always strive to remain faithful to their Salesian priestly commitment desiring only to please the Lord by serving Him in the poor and abandoned youth and those entrusted to their pastoral care. I thank all the confreres of the Provincial House and BIRDY communities for organizing the ordinations meaningfully.

## NEW PROVINCIALS

I extend my heartfelt congratulations in the name of our Province to Fr Jose Koyickal and Fr Davis Maniparamben, who have been appointed by our Rector Major, Fr Angel Fernandez Artime, as the Provincials of Bangalore and New Delhi Provinces respectively. They have been called upon to serve their respective Provinces for a six year term from 2021 to 2027. Fr Davis Maniparamben will be installed as provincial on February 08, 2021 while Fr Jose Koyickal will assume office on February 11, 2021. We implore the Lord to shower his manifold blessings of mind and spirit upon the new provincials so that they may effectively and boldly carry out the work of animation and governance according the mind of the Congregation giving rise to greater levels of apostolic efficacy and fruitfulness especially for the sustainable development and future of our young people.

I take this opportunity to also convey my gratitude to the outgoing provincials, Fr. Joyce Mathew Thonikuzhiyil of the province of Bangalore and Fr. Jose Mathew Koorappallil of the province of New Delhi who have enormously contributed to the growth and consolidation of Salesian charism in their respective Provinces for the benefit of young people, the faithful and people in general.

## UPCOMING PROVINCE MEETINGS/EVENTS

04 January	WEBINAR Acting - Green Commandment VI: Develop an Integral Ecology," by Rev. Fr Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam (Department of Integral Human Development - Vatican)
07 January	Province Priestly Ordinations
08-10 January	Provincial Council
14 January	WEBINAR Praxis Orientation: "Grounding Laudato Si' in the Soil and Culture of Human Rights in India," by Rev. Fr Cedric Prakash S.J. (Gujarat Jesuit Province)
15 January	Death Anniversary of Fr Moonnanappallil Jacob

## SALESIAN SANCTITY IN JANUARY

8 January	Blessed Titus Zeman, priest and martyr
15 January	Blessed Louis Variara, Priest and Founder of the Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
22 January	Blessed Laura Vicuña, youth
24 January	St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, Titular and Patron of the Society of St. Francis de Sales
30 January	Blessed Bronislaus Markiewicz, Priest and Founder of the Congregation of Saint Michael the Archangel
31 January	St. John Bosco, Priest, Founder of the Society of St Francis de Sales, of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and of the Salesian Cooperators

## CONDOLENCES

We offer our heartfelt condolences:

- To the Provincial and the Confreres of the Province of Chennai at the demise of Rev. Fr. Felix Koikara SDB, who passed away at the age of 83 on December 26, 2020 at Don Bosco Tirupattur.

## CONCLUSION

Thank you Lord for everything. Even though 2020 has been a year of gloom, it has taught us several lessons. We should never forget that God is in control and that we have God's abiding presence and protection. 2020 has taught us:

to pray more and depend on God,  
that we are fragile and not in control of the planet,  
that we are all connected,  
that we are responsible for those in need,  
that we really don't need much to live,  
that all those things that we considered important are not so,  
that life can be meaningful when lived simply.

As the New Year has set in, may Mother Mary be our model of faith and discipleship in Jesus. We hope that we live the year 2021 "in Jesus" with the guidance of Mother Mary walking in the footsteps of our Father and Founder, St. John Bosco.

Wish you all a very meaningful and enriching feast of St. John Bosco,

Yours in the Lord,



Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar SDB,  
Provincial

